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during the Cold War

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# The Wartime Regime and the Development of Public Diet in Taiwan (1947–1950s)

Pin-Tsang TSENG

**Abstract:** The Nationalist Party retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War. Faced with a population explosion, economic recession, and a serious shortage of resources, the Nationalist government retained the “wartime regime” instituted during the civil war, while strengthening control of key foods – which significantly affected people’s daily life, and notably diet. This article argues that the purpose of implementing the wartime regime was not only to stabilise livelihoods, particularly to secure basic living conditions for a large number of soldiers and government employees; it also helped the Nationalist Party consolidate its authoritarian rule and establish a firm grip on national resources, facilitating national defence and economic development. The stringent control measures of the wartime regime caused, however, a gross imbalance between staple and subsidiary foods in the diet of local people, leading to consumption of excessive amounts of starchy staple foods and widening the gap between the diets of farmers and non-farmers.

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**Keywords:** post-war Taiwan, wartime regime, wartime life, public diet, food consumption

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## Introduction

Food is essential for human survival. During wartime, amid extensive devastation and economic hardship, governments in modern times have tended to interfere with market functions and impose stringent economic controls, notably food rationing. Government policy becomes a major factor affecting people's diet, taking precedence over such traditional ones as wealth, identity, customs, and habits. While stringent food controls by a government can alleviate food shortages and help attain a more even distribution of food, they also reinforce government authority – facilitating its economic exploitation and mobilisation of the masses for various movements.

At the end of the Second World War, in August 1945, China reclaimed sovereignty over Taiwan, which had been under Japanese rule since 1895, in accordance with the Cairo Declaration. Civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party erupted shortly afterwards, prompting the Nationalist government to establish the so-called wartime regime in 1947 – before retreating to Taiwan in 1949. Thenceforth, Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen (Jinmen), and Matsu (Mazu) were subject to the jurisdiction of the Nationalist government and the rule of the wartime regime, the purpose of which was to “suppress the communist rebellion.” The wartime regime refers to the abnormal state of the country invoked by the Nationalist Party government to counter wars and rebellions based on the National General Mobilisation Act (國家總動員法, *guojia zongdong yuansfa*).

The government can issue various kinds of administrative ordinance to control supplies, human resources, money, price, culture, and specific people and also to restrict people's right of association, speech, publication, communication, and gathering. In the National General Mobilisation Act, Article 3, it says: “The Act defines the term National General Mobilisation Supplies as: [...] B. Food, feed, clothing, and texture. C. Medicine, medical equipment and supplies, and medical materials.” Also, in Article 7, it says:

Once the Act takes effect, when necessary, the government may direct, manage, control, or prohibit the production, sale, usage, repair, storage, consumption, and transfer of the General National Mobilisation Supplies. The Act may apply to daily supplies as well when necessary.

The implementation of the wartime regime not only allowed the Nationalist Party to maintain its one-party dictatorship and its powerful mobilisation ability but also made various restrictions on people's economic lives. The late president Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) once declared, "The National General Mobilisation Act is mostly about controlling the economic lives and economic behaviors in public and private sectors" (Qin 1984: 302–307). Not until the late 1960s, following Taiwan's political stabilisation and rapid economic development, did the wartime regime gradually unravel – before its eventual official termination in the early 1990s.

Although Taiwan was not engaged in much armed conflict, the Nationalist government still asserted strict control over commodities and social activities. This was in line with the policy of "National Mobilisation for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion" (動員戡亂, *dongyuan kanluan*), based on the National General Mobilisation Act. With this policy, the Nationalist Government established a firm grip on economic resources, exerting comprehensive and systematic economic control.

Among the various aspects of daily life, diet was most profoundly affected by the implementation of the wartime regime; it turned out to be the most effective tool for the Nationalist government to influence the lives of local people. Food is a basic human need, and expenditure on food and drink accounted for the bulk of consumption in the early stages of the post-war era. Diet, therefore, bore the brunt of government regulation of basic commodities. A litany of food-related control measures were put in place, such as rules for production, rationing, and restrictions on banquets, the import of expensive food materials, and food/drink consumption. This greatly distorted local people's dietary habits. The purpose of this article, then, is to probe the changes in these habits brought on by the Nationalist government's wartime regime in the early post-war years, as well as other regime effects – such as economic benefits and the reinforcement of authoritarian rule.

As the direction of global Cold War history has changed in recent years, more and more scholars have been paying close attention to the development of cultural and social history – stepping aside from the conventional political and diplomatic arcs. Similar phenomena can be discovered in the Cold War history of Taiwan, too. Research interest has been directed away from the authoritarian regime

of the Nationalist Party and the development of politics, economy, and society under the Party's control towards the change in daily lives instead. Among discussions of the latter, the Nationalist Party's control over the production, import, and export of rice, wheat, and milk is one of the topics that has received the earliest attention – because it is involved with economic development, national security, United States aid, and similar (Liu 2011: 46–49; Chen 2017: 65–67).

Nevertheless, the literature still lacks further discussion on how the Nationalist Party distributed food in a reasonable way to solve poverty, famine, and ethnic contradictions, and at the same time reinforced its efficiency of rule. As a result, the current literature is unable to truly reflect the influence of the Nationalist Party's governance on people's daily lives. The purpose of this study is not only to fill this gap by illustrating the changes occurring in what was appearing on the dining table, but also to illustrate how the evolution of people's daily lives conversely affected the Nationalist Party regime in Taiwan too.

The implementation of the wartime regime began in 1947, while the strictest restrictions on people's daily lives were imposed in the 1950s. The control of the Nationalist Party was of great significance during the 1950s due to harsh economic conditions, a shortage of food, and the people being impoverished. After the 1950s, the wartime regime was gradually loosened in tandem with economic improvement, more abundant food resources, and the steadier lives of people. Therefore, the study focuses on the period between 1947 and 1959. Sources used for this study include regulations issued by the government, publication and files, memoirs, and oral histories.

In addition to the preface and the conclusion, this study first analyses the formation of wartime regime in Taiwan, as well as its control imposed on people and the benefit it brought to the Nationalist Party government. Then, this study discusses the change in people's diet under the influence of the wartime regime, including the imbalance in food consumption structures and the development of different food consumption patterns between peasants and non-peasants.

## The Implementation of the Wartime Regime

As Taiwan was a Japanese colony, the National General Mobilisation Act was in force on the island as early as 1939 due to the outbreak of the Second Sino–Japanese War. While this programme was terminated after the end of the Second World War, the Nationalist Party implemented it in Taiwan once more in 1947. In that year – and together with the promulgation of the “Guidelines on the Implementation of the Constitution during the Period of National Mobilisation for the Suppression of the Communist Rebellion” (動員戡亂完成憲政實施綱要, *dongyuan kanluan nancheng xianzheng shishi gangyao*), which were issued in order to deal with matters related to the Communist Rebellion – the National General Mobilisation Act was officially extended to the post-war era (Lin 2008: 139). As it coincided with the retrocession of Taiwan from Japan, the Act entered into effect together with the implementation of the Chinese legal system in Taiwan. In other words, while Taiwan was now free from the Japanese wartime scheme it still fell under the yoke of the Nationalist government’s Mobilisation Act. Various restrictions on the lives of ordinary people thus ensued, particularly after the permanent settlement of the Nationalist government-in-exile in Taiwan.

According to the Act, the government was mandated not only to mobilise and utilise military resources but also to control civilian assets, personnel, finances, prices, and cultural matters too. As a form of state of exception (see Cheng in this topical issue), numerous administrative ordinances were issued under the authority of the Act and its subordinate legislation in order to facilitate the use of these personnel and resources. For example, the Nationalist government issued “Guidelines on the Strict Regulations Governing Frugal Consumption” (厲行節約消費辦法綱要, *Lixing jieyue xiaofei banfa gangyao*) in the second half of 1947 as the enabling statute of its austerity policies during the Period of National Mobilisation in the Suppression of Communist Rebellion. More supplementary decrees regulating provisions and banquets were afterwards issued on the basis of this decree (Lin 2008: 143; Chen 2013: 195). In the early 1950s, together with the establishment of the Commission on the Promotion of Wartime Life (戰時生活促進委員會, *Zhanshi shenghuo cujin weiyuanhui*), the promulgation and implementation of the “Guidelines on Wartime Life” (戰時生活運動綱要, *Zhanshi shenghuo yundong gangyao*), the Wartime Life

Frugality Movement (戰時生活節約運動, *Zhanshi shenghuo jieyue yundong*), as well as Chiang Kai-Shek's repeated remarks on wartime life in a series of speeches, the above-mentioned decrees attained a level of influence that was almost spiritual in nature. Comprehensive control over daily life was thereby established.

One of the most significant effects of the wartime regime on everyday life was that the government, touting slogans such as "Frugality of Consumption" (節約消費, *jieyue xiaofei*) and "Build the Country with Diligence and Thriftiness" (勤儉建國, *qinjian jianguo*), managed to bring the production, circulation, consumption, and pricing of daily commodities under its firm grip. Through both great efforts to boost productivity and stringent regulations imposed on consumption, the government indeed managed "to create an atmosphere of tension and solemnity, and to make everyone meet wartime requirements." (Institute of Taiwan History 1950a). Such policies also served two further practical purposes for the Nationalist government in Taiwan: the stabilisation of the sociopolitical and economic situation, and the extraction of all available resources in support of the war effort. The government faced numerous challenges at that time: political uncertainty, low productivity in agriculture and industry, poverty, and a sudden increase in the population size due to the arrival of Chinese refugees. In order to reduce the possibility of social upheavals triggered by the lack of essential goods, the government needed to boost rice production, adopt strict regulation of daily commodities, and to induce people to live thriftily. On the other hand, the government extracted more economic resources to be used in the state's economic and military sectors via increasing productivity and restricted consumption. In 1952, Premier Chen Cheng made a statement from a military operational perspective:

The exertion of "the economy of materials" (物資的經濟, *wuzi de jingji*) is important in a wartime economy [...]. It is necessary to exert restrictions on civilian life and prohibit wasteful resource consumption. We need to prioritize military affairs in order to achieve victory. (*United Daily News* 1952: 1)

In 1953, from the viewpoint of development economics, Yin Zhongrong, the Chairperson of the Taiwan Area Productive Enterprises Management Committee (台灣區生產事業管理委員會, *Taiwanqu shengchan shiye guanli weiyuanhui*), argued that:



We still need to remain thrifty in the following four to five years in order to accumulate capital and invest in productive enterprises. If we strive to improve living standards regardless of the current situation and waste what we have produced and what we have received from the U.S. aid program on consumption, then we will be stuck in crisis. (Yin 1973: 32–35)

Control over daily commodities is significant in times of economic hardship. Increased grain production, together with control over food consumption, not only prevented millions of newly arrived refugees from going hungry but also stabilised the dire situation overall. In addition, it avoided wasteful expenditure and facilitated capital accumulation. It has been argued, therefore, that these strategies created favourable conditions for Taiwan's later economic take-off. Yan Yancun, the Supervisor of the Chemical Industry Division of the Commission on Economic Stability of the Executive Yuan (行政院經濟安定委員會化工組, *Xingzhengyuan jingji anding weiyuanhui huagongzu*), stated that the civilian population's modest enjoyment of daily pleasures (低享受, *dixiangshou*) and low consumption, as well as the efforts to increase production in the 1950s, played important roles in Taiwan's rapid economic growth (Yan 1989: 76).

According to the wartime regime, the state's control over food and drink could be divided into two parts. The government fixed the price of rice through the regulation and distribution of daily necessities (mainly grains). Meanwhile, the government promoted a variety of movements in the name of thrift – especially the aforementioned Wartime Life Frugality Movement – in order to inhibit unnecessary food consumption activities such as banquets or purchasing foreign foods. On the one hand, the people of Taiwan had already experienced commodity control and food rationing during the Second World War under Japanese colonial rule. The Nationalist Party, on the other, had experience in executing food-rationing policies and implementing the “New Life Movement,” under which a frugal lifestyle was promoted. These experiences proved, therefore, to be advantageous for once again setting up a control scheme for food and drink. In addition, the Nationalist Party's authoritarian rule not only suppressed landowners' dissenting voices on food control policies but also facilitated the implementation of the ensuing control, distribution, and allocation policies (Huang 2004: 180–183).

Food was the foremost daily commodity placed under government control. As early as October of 1945, the Nationalist government faced a series of acute problems. The destruction of production facilities during wartime, a lack of fertilizer, and a reduced crop yield resulted in soaring prices and a severe shortage of supplies. Therefore, the General Purchasing and Rationing System (總收購總配給制度, *Zongshougou zongpeiji zhidu*) of the Japanese colonial period was revived and extended by the Nationalist government. By implementing the “Interim Measures on Food Administration of Taiwan Province” (臺灣省管理糧食臨時辦法, *Taivansheng guanli liangshi linshi banfa*), the government seized control over rice – Taiwan’s staple food, and including grain previously stored by the civilian population – and continued to carry out food rationing. After the abolishing of the Interim Measures on the Food Administration of Taiwan Province due to their ineffectiveness, a multichannel scheme of food control was introduced instead. While the following years witnessed changes in policy, in general the government adopted a diversified approach and followed these principles: to meet the needs of public servants; to ensure a sufficient supply of food; and, to increase exports of surplus crops.

The multichannel scheme can be defined as follows: Apart from great efforts to increase rice productivity, the government obtained large quantities of grain from farmers and landowners via different means. Examples include: a tax in kind on paddy fields (田賦徵實, *tianfu zhengshi*); a rice–fertilizer bartering programme (肥料換穀, *feiliao huangu*); the compulsory purchase of paddy fields (強制收購, *qiangzhi shougou*); the mandatory purchase of rice in proportion to tax paid (隨賦收購, *sui fu shougou*); and, repaying loans with crop yields (貸款給農民再折價收回稻穀, *daikuan gei nongmin zai zhejia shouhui daogu*). Meanwhile, certain auxiliary strategies – including selling grain within a limited time frame (限期出售糧食, *xianqi chushou liangshi*), franchises for grain sales (糧商特許制度, *liangshang texu zhidu*), rice-producing zones (糧區制度, *liangqu zhidu*), and a prohibition on transporting rice out of Taiwan Province (查禁糧食私運出省, *chajin liangshi siyun chusheng*) – were adopted in order both to restrict the market circulation of grain and to prevent fluctuations in price.

The land reform initiated in 1949 made it possible for the government to bypass existing landowners and collect taxes from the producers directly. The government, therefore, exercised control over

cheap and sufficient quantities of grain (Huang 2004: 180). As far as the regulations on consumption are concerned, in 1950, Wu Guozhen, Governor of Taiwan Province, abolished the Regulations Governing Frugality in Food Consumption (節約糧食消費辦法, *Jieyue liangshi xiaofei banfa*) of 1946. Meanwhile, authorised by the National General Mobilisation Act, a new regulation was promulgated. A number of actions such as rice milling, using rice as animal fodder, and selling rice that fell short of the required standards were prohibited. The restriction on making wine out of rice was mentioned as well (Taiwan Historica 1950).

The year 1952 witnessed a significant increase in food production and the stabilisation of prices. In addition, Taiwan was supplied with flour and soybeans from US aid programmes. The Nationalist government, however, still made great efforts to boost grain productivity and continued food rationing. For instance, the rice ration for public servants was partly replaced with a flour one. Meanwhile, the substitution of flour and sweet potatoes for the more expensive rice was promoted (Lee 1955: 30). Flour in particular was cheap in price, and considered more nutritious than sweet potato. Under the pressure imposed by the US on wheat marketing, the Nationalist government not only asked public servants and soldiers to eat more flour products but also exchanged flour for rice with farmers – in order to promote the consumption of flour (Liu 2011: 22). As a result, the cost of consuming staple foods was brought down. In addition, the export of surplus rice led to an increase in foreign exchange earnings. Rice was, hence, not only a food resource but also a cash crop used by the government to help solve Taiwan's financial crisis.

Furthermore, other foodstuffs – including salt, cooking oil, sweet potato, shredded sweet potato, soybeans, butter, powdered milk, and salted fish – were gradually brought under government control. While at first the Taiwan Provincial Food Bureau was in charge simply of food administration, its function was then expanded to cover areas related to food production and expenditure too. These included promoting rice and grain cultivation, and, as noted, encouraging people to replace rice with flour and sweet potato products. The Food Bureau thus became one of the most important agencies of the Taiwan Provincial Government in the post-war years (Division of Information 1970: 39–40). The head of the Food Bureau, Li Lian-chun, who was in charge of food administration for 24 years, became

a key figure in Taiwan's agricultural development and the distribution of a variety of important daily commodities during the early post-war years (Hua 1984: 251–290).

The Taiwan Provincial Supply Bureau, another agency of the Taiwan Provincial Government, administered the import and distribution of important daily commodities such as soybeans, butter, powdered milk, and salted fish. Numerous regulations, however, were imposed on the import of these commodities, as the government needed to draw on its limited foreign exchange earnings to purchase them. Let us take soybeans – an important daily commodity that was the raw material for cooking oil, tofu, soymilk, soybean cake, and soy sauce – as an example. While some of these soybeans were cultivated in Taiwan, the majority were procured via two different means. The Supply Bureau, on the one hand, purchased them from foreign countries via its centralised purchasing programme. On the other, Taiwan imported soybeans through US aid programmes. These purchased soybeans were then distributed to cooking-oil factories and tofu producers. While producers might attempt to profit from either hoarding the soybeans or from using them for other purposes, they were prohibited from doing so by these policies. In the meantime, normal economic activities were not impeded; the price of soybeans was therefore stabilised by these policies (Zhao 1985: 14–16).

Such tight and strict regulations secured the prices of daily commodities. Grain was sufficient to feed Taiwan's military personnel and civilian population, and the extent of its price-rise rate proved to be less significant than that of other commodities. Meanwhile, a great amount of surplus grain was sold abroad: the export of 2.19 million tons of Penglai (Japonica) rice from 1950 to 1969 generated USD 358 million in the form of foreign exchange earnings, making it second among Taiwan's most valuable export goods (Division of Information 1970: 40–42).

Apart from the regulations on staple foods, different levels of government in Taiwan also managed to oversee frivolous forms of food and drink consumption – like banquets and local festivals – through the enforcement of administrative ordinances and decrees pertaining to the National General Mobilisation Act. For example, private restaurants were renamed “public canteens” (公共食堂, *gong-gong shitang*) and served mainly communal and budget meals. A banquet tax of 10 per cent was imposed on set meals (合菜類的會餐, *he-*

*cailei de huican*) costing above a certain price, while a tax of 20 per cent was charged on banquets served by female attendants (Chen 2013: 198; Taiwan Province Government 1956: 228). The aim of these policies was to reduce conspicuous consumption, while also increasing state revenue generated from it.

The implementation of the above policies and regulations not only helped to solve real problems such as food shortages, budget deficits, and similar. To the Nationalist Party, which had just been defeated in the civil war, it also helped to strengthen the regime in Taiwan and to consolidate authoritarian rule. On the one hand, these policies were beneficial in helping the Nationalist Party's followers to have a steady life – especially as most of these individuals were soldiers, public servants, and teachers. As Wakabayashi noted: “The loyalty of this group (i.e. soldiers, public servants, and teachers) must be secured at all cost” (Wakabayashi 2008: 96). Immigrants who followed the Nationalist Party were its direct support, meanwhile. In exchange for stable living conditions, immigrants had to remain loyal to the regime.

On the other hand, the policies enacted under the wartime regime – which suppressed people's daily lives – were part of the spiritual mobilisation invoked by the Nationalist Party. As known to everyone, “Re-Taking the Chinese Mainland” was an excuse for the Nationalist Party to restrict the normalisation of the constitution and maintain a one-party dictatorship in the name of continuing Mobilisation for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion. Promoting war-time life not only clearly demonstrated the determination to re-take the Chinese mainland, but also reminded people to consume frugally in preparation for future combat. Therefore, “Re-Taking the Chinese Mainland” was more than a slogan – becoming, indeed, a significant daily practice. In the 1950s, a military officer of the Nationalist government agonised constantly in his diary after having slap-up meals. He felt guilty about feasting on such delicious food while his fellows in mainland China suffered from hunger in these hard times (Chi 2015: I 558, II 52).

It is worth mentioning that during the civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party from 1947 to 1949, Shanghai and Nanjing were faced with difficulties of fiscal imbalance and a severe shortage of foreign exchange revenues under the Nationalist Party regime. Officials promoted the Wartime Life Frugality Move-

ment based on the National General Mobilisation Act as well. However, these policies were not properly or effectively implemented. Compared to the poverty experienced among lower-class people, upper-class individuals – including bureaucrats of the Nationalist Party – still maintained a luxury lifestyle, leading to the crashing of the economy and being the main cause for the regime's defeat in the civil war. This bitter experience was also an important reason for the Nationalist Party later promoting various wartime lifestyle policies in a stricter and more comprehensive way after its retreat to Taiwan.

## An Imbalanced Food Consumption Structure

The most profound and direct impact of the National General Mobilisation Act on eating and drinking habits was the change in the island nation's food consumption structures. According to Ralph N. Gleason's "Taiwan Food Balances" (see Table 1 below), a survey conducted between 1935 and 1954, the average Taiwanese person consumed 994 grams of food per day during the pre-war period and the early stages of the Second Sino-Japanese war (1935–1939). The average caloric intake was 1865 kcal/day. Together with the implementation of the National Mobilisation Law in 1940 under Japanese colonial rule, the consumption of essential foods such as sweet potato, beans, vegetables, fruit, meat, egg, and fish fell sharply because of the introduction of rationing. The consumption of grain, on the other hand, was guaranteed because this scheme served to ensure everyone a basic intake of this staple. Because of the rationing program, rural people consumed more grain than before – total consumption rose to 301g. The surrender of Japan and the destruction caused by airstrikes, together with the chaos resulting from the transfer of ruling authority, had a severe impact upon supplies from 1945 to 1946. In general, this period saw the consumption of poor-quality foods, and that of beans, fruit, fish, and meat fell to even lower levels. To sum up, the implementation of the National Mobilisation Law during the Second World War not only lowered the quality of people's diet but also increased their consumption of staple foods.

Table 1. Total Per Capita Daily Availability (in grams)

	1935– 1939 average	1940– 1944 average	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954
1. Cereals	270 (251)	301 (298)	238 (237)	324 (320)	344 (335)	357 (351)	383 (371)	389 (366)	386 (360)	378 (345)	430 (387)	397 (342)
Others	(19)	(3)	(1)	(4)	(9)	(6)	(12)	(23)	(26)	(33)	(43)	(55)
2. Starchy roots and tubers	319	257	190	246	206	210	199	194	171	171	179	195
Sweet potato	(309)	(250)	(184)	(237)	(187)	(200)	(192)	(187)	(164)	(164)	(172)	(188)
Others	(10)	(7)	(6)	(9)	(19)	(10)	(7)	(7)	(7)	(7)	(7)	(7)
3. Sugar	30	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26
4. Pulses, nuts, and seeds	27	8	5	14	23	28	24	32	35	46	46	46
5. Vegetables	170	122	103	130	169	167	168	175	173	169	165	162
6. Fruits	54	73	30	43	83	63	58	64	52	46	49	45
7. Meats	51	30	16	22	27	28	29	33	43	46	49	47
8. Eggs	6	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
9. Fish	56	27	6	22	25	32	27	33	36	41	44	47
10. Milk	3	1	neg.	neg.	neg.	neg.	neg.	2	2	1	2	2
11. Oils and fats	8	4	2	4	5	6	5	7	9	10	9	9
Total	994	853	620	835	913	921	923	959	937	938	1003	981
Index (1935–1939 Avg.=100)	100	85.81	62.37	84.00	91.85	92.66	92.86	96.48	94.27	94.37	100.91	98.69

Source: Gleason 1956: 14–20.

Two trends can be noted during the post-1947 era. These years saw the increase of daily consumption of grain from 270g/day (1935–1939) to 430g/day (1953), dropping slightly to 397g/day (1954). Meanwhile, consumption of sweet potato dropped significantly (from 319g to 179g to 195g, respectively). In addition, a new Taiwanese food consumption pattern was established. While rice was regarded as a staple food as usual, flour was consumed more and became another staple as well. Compared to the increasing consumption of grain, the amount of high-quality foods (e.g. egg, fish, and meat) eaten during the years from 1947 to 1954 proved to be less than that of the period between 1935 and 1939. In other words, while people were eating more rice in the 1950s they were also consuming lower-quality non-staple foods.

**Table 2. Changes in the Consumption of Staple and Non-Staple Foods in the Pre- and Post-War Eras**

	<b>Pre-war era (average number, 1935–1937)</b>	<b>Post-war era (average number, 1956–1958)</b>	<b>Rate of change (in %)</b>
Rice (kg)	115	166	+45
Soybeans (kg)	8.51	7.60	-10.69
Pork (kg)	17.03	16.52	-2.99
Fish (kg)	24.10	20.67	-10.60
Vegetables (kg)	78.00	68.40	-12.30
Poultry raised per capita	1.66	1.17	-29.50

Source: Xu 1978: 5–44.

Despite the fact that certain details of Gleason’s study have been called into question, and that he might have overestimated the consumption of rice during wartime, the results of his study on consumption trends in the 1950s prove to be similar to those of Xu Qingzhong’s (1978) own analysis. According to Xu, the average population size of Taiwan in the pre-war era (1935–1937) was 5.459 million people; this figure reached 10.3 million people in the post-war period (1956–1958). On average an individual in Taiwan consumed 115 kilograms of rice per year between 1935 and 1937, while between 1956 and 1958 a single person ate 166 kilograms thereof per year. In other words, compared to the pre-war era, the consumption of rice



per capita during the post-war period grew by 45 per cent (see Table 2 above) (Xu 1978: 5–44). Nevertheless, compared to the increasing consumption of rice per capita, that of non-staple foods dropped. Table 2 shows the reduction in consumption of soybeans, pork, fish, and vegetables. No data regarding the consumption of poultry can be found. Nevertheless, as the amount of imported poultry was not substantial, the decreased number of poultry raised per capita may thus indicate a reduction in consumption thereof in Taiwan.

At first glance, food prices seem to have been the main factor that led to the increased consumption of staples and the reduction in that of non-staple foods. The abundant and cheap supply of staples was made possible by increased rice productivity and the flour distributed by US aid programmes. As everyone's capacity for food intake is limited, the consumption of pricey non-staple foods would then decrease. A closer look at this issue, however, suggests that the government's emphasis on rice production actually proved to be a key factor. Xu argues that:

Because of its limited financial and human resources at the time (the promotion of technology and production loans), the government made great efforts to promote the production of rice, and such strategies led to unfavorable conditions for other crops. (Xu 1978: 67–72)

As the government paid too much attention to increasing grain productivity, the insufficient production of non-staple foods and the ensuing higher prices eventually led to a reduction in consumption. In addition, although fruits like bananas and pineapples were grown in the early post-war years, the primary purpose of their cultivation was to increase foreign exchange earnings via export.

## The Growing Difference between Peasant and Non-Peasant Diets

It can be argued that people in Taiwan recovered from war-induced poverty in the 1950s because of the implementation of the wartime regime. People were free of famine because of the increased consumption of rice. Nevertheless, while the Japanese wartime regime had narrowed the gap in the standards of living between peasants and

non-peasants, it was widened again by the Nationalists' one imposed in the post-war years.

Under the Japanese wartime scheme, the colonial government regulated the production and distribution of food resources in order to maximise utility. In addition food rationing was conducted on a scientific basis, in which people's basic nutrient requirements were assessed; the scheme was introduced in order to distribute essential goods and other foodstuffs among citizens. In other words, everyone's nutritional intake was put under the government's homogenous and militarised domination. Therefore, while factors such as wealth, social status, and dietary customs had previously played important roles in people's diverse eating practices, these factors were now replaced by a scientific scheme designed by the Japanese government – in which food was rationed according to people's age and amount of labour. Those from a well-off, middle-class background merely received the standard amount of food. Nutritious and high-calorie foods, on the other hand, were given to those who worked in labour-intensive occupations; among them, the peasant might gain extra nutrition from uncontrolled agrarian products. As a result, the nutritional status of these labour-intensive workers – in particular peasants – was better than that of the middle class (Tseng 2017: 10). Meanwhile, certain social issues – such as the gap in living standards that resulted from the development of cities from the 1930s onwards – were also addressed through the introduction of rationing.

The Nationalist government's wartime regime, however, widened the dietary disparities between peasants and non-peasants, and the latter received more protection from the government. After the end of 1950s, the income of craftsmen, merchants, and the self-employed rose significantly in Taiwan's burgeoning industries and economy in the 1950s. On the other hand, as the result of the increased grain yield and the decline in the price of agricultural products, this period also witnessed a significant improvement of these people's diet. Let us take the results of a 1953 survey as an example. Employers, freelancers, and small-business owners (e.g. restaurant and grocery store owners) became Taiwan's top-three paid occupations, and people in these categories also spent more money on food and drink than those in other occupations did. These individuals must, therefore, have enjoyed better food and drink (Raper, Quan, and Chen 1954: 130).

Although the salaries of public servants (especially military personnel) and of those working in public enterprises proved to be relatively low (Han 2003: 339–341), they were nevertheless entitled to receive fixed allowances, special grants, and other benefits besides. They were also included in the government's food-rationing system. These informal payments actually constituted the majority of their income. Allowances in kind were rationed on the basis of household size, and necessities such as rice, coal, cooking oil, and salt were provided to help fulfil their basic dietary requirements. Meanwhile, state and public enterprise employees enjoyed a 50 per cent discount on water bills (Ye 1958: 37; Taiwan Province Government 1958: 546). Furthermore, canteens and restaurants were established on-site at public enterprises and government agencies in order to provide free or relatively budget-friendly meals. While public servants could not enjoy extravagant tastes, at least they were provided with a steady supply of food provisions via these schemes. Through these governmental measures that guaranteed nutritional abundance, the social status of public servants was secure and reinforced.

For the above-mentioned reasons, it was these non-peasant populations – mainly comprised of craftsmen, merchants, and public servants – who first enjoyed an improvement in diet in the 1950s. According to Raper, Quan, and Chen's survey of those who lived in Taiwan's 12 cities, while the quantities of meat and fish consumption differed significantly according to income and occupation, in general urban residents – who were typically not peasants – could enjoy both rice and tofu (Raper, Quan, and Chen 1954: 139, 238). In contrast, the rate and extent of improvement in the diet of rural people – peasants, fishermen, and those who were engaged in animal husbandry – proved to be lagging behind.

The surveys conducted in 1950 and 1951, meanwhile, indicate that rice production was sufficient to meet Taiwan's domestic consumption needs, with the surplus being exported. The total real income of peasants, however, was approximately half of that of 1931/1932, and the income of semi-tenants and tenants was reduced by 20 per cent. Compared to the situation of the Japanese colonial period, therefore, peasants' diet deteriorated (Zhang 1974: 235–302). According to the survey of the Sino–American Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR) in 1952, the majority of the farmers interviewed across 14 villages indicated that the quality of what they

ate was worse than before (Raper 1954: 113). In the 1953 report, the inhabitants were prone to suffer malnutrition because their land – on which a three-year rotational cropping pattern was carried out – failed to produce enough rice and sweet potato to meet their needs (JCRR 1953). Even in 1959, those living along the coasts of the three counties of Yunlin, Chiayi (Jiayi), and Tainan still often existed in extreme poverty (Taiwan Historica 1959).

Because of peasants' limited income, the degree of improvement in their diets lagged far behind that of non-peasants. The Family Budget Survey of the 1960s suggests a significant difference between peasants and non-peasants' disposable income levels – the former was equivalent to only 70 per cent of the latter. The considerable deterioration in the quality of peasants' diet was noted as well. In addition, for the latter the percentage of household expenses constituted of expenditure on food was above average compared to other families in Taiwan (Zhang 1974: 193–233). The government's over-emphasis on the increasing of rice productivity and control over its circulation resulted in oversupply. The prices of certain agricultural products and rice increased slightly, but those of other commodities rose more dramatically. Peasants, therefore, experienced substantial financial losses during the process of these commodities' production and circulation, and their families could not make ends meet. In addition, the deficiency of provisions led to the per capita income of Taiwan's peasants being less than that of other workers. More importantly, as the Food Bureau procured the majority of grain via a variety of means, peasants did not make a profit even if rice prices rose. The Nationalist government claimed that peasants' lives improved due to the introduction of land reform. Nevertheless, with the implementation of the wartime regime, the main beneficiaries were not peasants but non-peasants – who now enjoyed low rice prices – as well as a government that profited from exporting tons of rice surplus.

## Conclusion

The improvement of material living conditions in Taiwan proved to be one of the most praiseworthy achievements of the Nationalist Party government after its retreat from China. The improvement of diet not only consolidated the foundation of its rule but also

strengthened the authoritarian regime. Although the significant roles played by US aid programmes, social stability, and economic development in this dietary progress cannot be denied, the implementation of the wartime regime in the early post-war years had a considerable impact on ordinary people's dietary habits as well.

The state, because of the "wartime circumstances," took firm control of food resources as well as of its distribution. At the same time, restraints were placed on frivolous consumption activities. While numerous regulations were implemented and came to govern daily life, the article has shown that the implementation of the wartime regime did indeed stabilise the lives of the people. In addition, it ensured that the basic needs of numerous public servants could be met. A solid foundation for the Nationalist government was thus established.

On the other hand, substantial resources were extracted and then devoted to military and economic development. More importantly, compared to the oppression of the Japanese colonial government's wartime regime, the one constructed in the post-war era eased the suffering caused by a lack of food during the period from 1945 to 1949. In addition, the implementation of this regime under the Nationalist government – together with economic development and the supplies from US aid programmes – did improve people's diets. The Nationalist government, at the same time, won the support of the civilian population. In other words, the wartime regime and the ensuing improvement of diet played important roles in sustaining the Nationalist government's ruling of Taiwan in the post-1949 era.

Certain impressive outcomes of the wartime regime can thus be noted. Nevertheless, the foundations of its implementation – such as the efforts to increase rice productivity, the government's control over large amounts of paddy field, and the maintenance of rice prices at the lower end of the scale – resulted in an imbalance between staple and non-staple foods in the ordinary person's diet and their excessive consumption of carbohydrates. From the second half of the 1960s, the consumption of staples gradually dropped. Meanwhile, flour replaced sweet potato and thereby became another staple – second only to rice in prominence. In addition, the consumption of non-staple foods such as fish, meat, vegetables, and fruit increased significantly.

While this period saw progress in overall dietary quality in Taiwan, increased rice production and the government's low-price policy

widened the gap between peasants and non-peasants in terms of food-consumption standards. The former suffered great monetary loss, and their income growth rates lagged behind inflation. In contrast, the latter benefitted not only from industrial and economic development but also from low rice prices. The improvement in the quality of what they ate and drank proved, therefore, to be significant. While the salary of public servants was relatively low, their diet proved to be more stable than that of peasants due to the government's food-rationing policies.

During the Cold War that would ultimately last for nearly half a century, the Nationalist Party was firmly supported by military men, government employees, and teachers – all of who it is generally believed that the mainlanders made up a relatively high percentage of. These groups of people followed the Nationalist Party to Taiwan, and thus formed a close relationship with the regime. The present study has revealed that this firm support from military men, government employees, and teachers was not without its historical reasons; the Nationalist Party's support in meeting their basic needs during the chaotic economic period of the early Cold War years was one of the most important, indeed.

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